THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA

AND

THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT

BY

G.A. CHADWICK

NATIONAL MONUMENTS

COUNCIL

THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA AND THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT

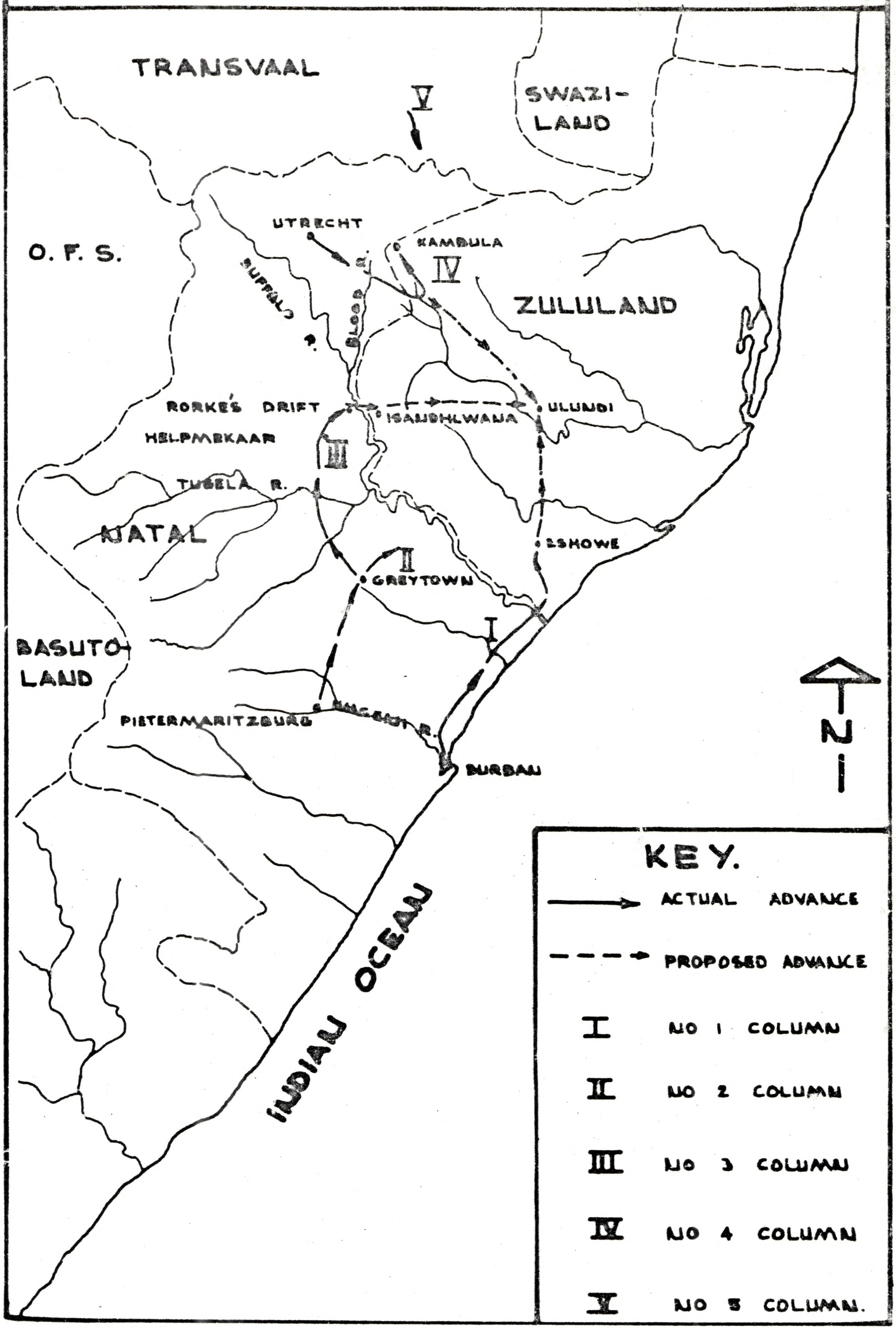
BY

G.A. CHADWICK

COPYRIGHT
RESERVED

MAP A.

THE BRITISH PLAN FOR THE INVASION OF ZULULAND.



KEY.

——→	ACTUAL ADVANCE
- - - →	PROPOSED ADVANCE
I	NO 1 COLUMN
II	NO 2 COLUMN
III	NO 3 COLUMN
IV	NO 4 COLUMN
V	NO 5 COLUMN.

INTRODUCTION

From prehistoric times the area around Rorke's Drift and Isandhlwana has been of considerable importance largely as a result of geographic factors such as:

I. The natural drift across the Buffalo River (Rorke's Drift)

2. The easy route to the heart of Zululand offered across Rorke's Drift past the Ispezi mountain and along the Nkandhla or Babango ridges.

3. The fact that below the drift the Buffalo River falls into a gorge offering no further easy crossing.

THE GENERAL PLAN OF ACTION (See Map A.)

The causes of the Zulu War will not be discussed but, in order to place the Isandhlwana campaign in its proper perspective, the general British plan of action must be mentioned. The main British aim was to occupy the Zulu Royal Kraal near Ulundi and, to achieve this, three main columns were to advance into Zululand.

No. I Column, which is often referred to as the Right Column, crossed the Tugela near its mouth on II/I/I879 and advanced towards Eshowe en route to Ulundi (Commanded by Col Pearson, 3rd Foot).

No. 4 Column, or the Left Column, commanded by Brevet Col. Evelyn Wood V.C., C.B., 90th Foot, moved from Bemba's Kop and on 20/I/I879 reached the White Umfolozi. On 29/3/I879 he drove off the Zulu attack on his fortified position at Kambula.

No. 3 Column, which became known as the Central Column, advanced from Pietermaritzburg via Greytown and Helpmekaar and commenced the crossing of the Buffalo River at Rorke's Drift on II/I/I879 with the object of advancing to Ulundi past the Ispezi mountain and along the Babanango ridge. The composition of this column with which we are concerned, was as follows:

Commanding

Brevet Col Glyn, C.B., 24th Foot

Staff:

Orderly Officer : Lieut. Coghill, 24th Foot
Principal Staff Officer : Maj. Clery
General Staff Duties : Capt. Gardner, I4th Hussars
Transport Duties : Capt. Essex, 75th Foot.
Commissariat Officer : Asst. Comm. Dunne
Paymaster : P/M Elliot
Medical Officer : Surgeon Maj. Shepherd
N. Bat. 5th Brigade R.A. : Brevet Lieut.- Col. Harness
No. 5 Coy. R.E. : Capt. Jones, R.E.
Ist Battalion 24th Foot (4 companies) : Brevet Lieut.-Col. Pulleine 24th Foot.

2nd Battalion 24th Foot : Lieut.-Col Degacher, C.B., 24th Foot
No. I Squadron Mounted Infantry: Lieut.-Col. Russell, I2th Lancers
Natal Mounted Police : Maj.Dartnell.
Natal Carbineers : Capt. Shepstone
Newcastle Mounted Rifles : Capt. Bradstreet
Buffalo Border Guard : Capt. Smith
3rd Regiment Natal Native Contingent : Commandant Lonsdale
Ist Battalion Native Contingent : Commandant Lonsdale
2nd Battalion Natal Native Contingent : Commandant Cooper
No. I Coy. Natal Native Pioneer Corps : Capt. Nolan

In all, some I,800 Europeans and 2,600 Natives. With this Column moved the Lieut.-General commanding the forces, Lord Chelmsford, K.C.B and some of his staff, notably Assistant Military Secretary, Brevet Lieut.-Col. Crealock; Aides-in-Camp Brevet Maj. Gossett and Lieut. Milne, R.N.

There were two other columns which were intended to guard the Zululand border.

These were:-

No. 2 Column : This was stationed near Krantzkop and Middle Drift, consisted mainly of the units of the Natal Native Contingent and was intended to be held in the reserve. (Commanded by Lieut.-Col. Durnford, R.E., who later joined the 3rd Column).

No. 5 Column : This was held in reserve in the Transvaal and took no active part in the campaign.

THE ADVANCE TO ISANDHLWANA (See Map B.)

The crossing of the Buffalo River by the Central Column was commenced at 4.30 am on the II/I/I879, which dawned a gloomy day with drizzling rain early in the morning. Lord Chelmsford rode off in a north-easterly direction to meet Col. Wood and was later visited by Col. Durnford who rode over from Krantzkop.

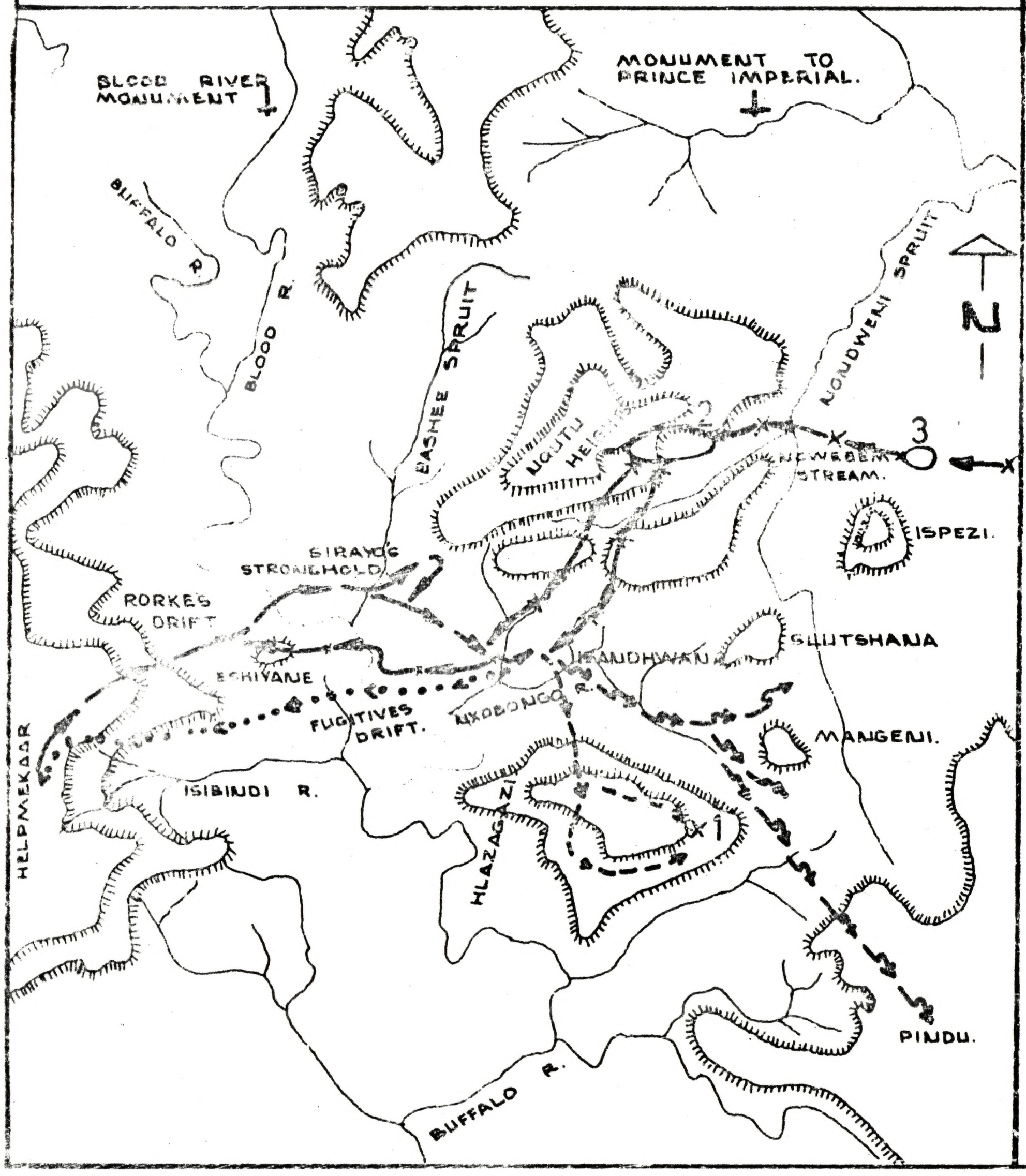
On I2/I/I879 a reconnaissance in strength was sent out against Sirayo who had a stronghold on a hill east of the present St. Augustine's Mission Station. The N.N.C. and the 24th Regiment were used in the attack against which the Zulus held out fiercely for about half an hour after which they dispersed, allowing the British forces to occupy the crest of the mountain and the fortified caves. A number of cattle were taken while the kraal was burnt. The way in which the N.N.C. behaved in this attack was probably the reason why so much reliance was placed on them when the troops were deployed on the morning of the battle of Isandhlwana.

After this successful action the next problem was to clear a road which could be used by the 200 -odd heavy wagons, which were attached to the column. The troops spent several days clearing boulders from the route chosen, while on I3/I/I879 Chelmsford selected the Isandhlwana area for a camp. He has often been criticised for this but one has to take the following into account:

(a) It is the only site in the immediate vicinity offering parking and camping facilities for a large force.

MAP B

GENERAL PLAN OF BRITISH AND ZULU MOVEMENTS IN VICINITY OF ISANDHLWANA



KEY

- HIGH GROUND AND RIDGES
- RIVERS AND STREAMS
- BRITISH ADVANCE ON ISANDHLWANA
- DARTNELL'S RECONNAISSANCE
- CHELMSFORD'S RECONNAISSANCE IN STRENGTH
- ROUTE OF FUGITIVES
- ZULU ADVANCE AND BIVOUACS

1 DARTNELL'S BIVOUAC 21·1·1879

2 ZULU BIVOUAC NIGHT OF 21·1·1879

3 ZULU BIVOUAC NIGHT OF 20·1·1879

(b) Brushwood for fires was fairly easily obtainable.

(c) It commands a good field of fire and although overlooked by hills to the north these are too far away to be significant in native warfare.

On 20/I/1879 the march to the new site was commenced and camp was pitched soon after midday. The layout of the camp is shown in Map C. As precautions against surprise the following steps were taken:

(a) Pickets were sent out some 2,000 yards to the front and flanks of the camp.

(b) Mounted vedettes were posted at the edge of the plateau to the north, far out on the plain to the east, and on Black's Koppie to the south.

(c) At night the pickets were posted 500 yards from the camp.

(d) The 24th Regiment mounted a permanent guard in the col.

N.B.(i) No laager was formed although warnings that this was necessary had been received from Paul Kruger and Paul Bester. It must, however, be added that most of the wagons were used for transporting the stores from Rorke's Drift during the day and it would have needed a laager of considerably more than 110 wagons, the number available, to accommodate the large force.

(ii) No trenches were dug. The substratum of shale would have made this very difficult. No breastworks were constructed although they were required by standing orders. A much less forceful argument to justify this is that the camp was a temporary one.

RECONNAISSANCE IN STRENGTH AGAINST THE ZULUS. (See Map B)

At dawn on 21/I/1879 it was decided to send a force to feel the Zulu strength in the vicinity of Matshana's Kraal behind the Hlazagazi mountain as it was believed that the Zulus were in considerable strength towards the south-east. This force consisted of a detachment of the N.N.C. under Commandant Lonsdale followed by Major Dartnell with a strong force of mounted troops. Later in the day Lord Chelmsford rode out to see what had happened, but nothing was visible. During the early afternoon a message was received from Partnell saying that some 400 Zulus had been sighted and Chelmsford ordered him to attack at his discretion.

The reconnaissance force had had a hard day. After leaving camp they had clambered up the steep slopes of the Hlazagazi mountain and spent several hours searching its almost inaccessible ravines on the southern slopes. At about 4 p.m., after Chelmsford's reply had been received, some 1,500 Zulus were seen holding a rocky col to the east of the mountain (Map B). The N.N.C. advanced and a mountain force was sent out to support them. By skilful manoeuvring the Zulus almost surrounded this force, but after a short exchange withdrew to the north-east.

Dartnell now decided to bivouac for the night and attack the following morning. He accordingly sent a message requesting rations, blankets and reinforcements. Chelmsford was annoyed that the force had not returned as ordered but furnished the blankets and rations. During the night the bivouac was disturbed by a supposed Zulu attack and this resulted in Chelmsford receiving a message at I.30 am. on 22/I/1879 that the Zulus were in great strength near the site of the bivouac.

As a result of these happenings Chelmsford supposed that the main Zulu impi must be facing Dartnell to the east of the Hlazagazi mountain. He therefore decided to go in support. Before dawn he left camp with more than half the troops available, moving along the road to Mangeni with 6 companies of the 2/24th Regiments, a squadron of mounted troops and 4 guns (under Col. Harness). Before leaving he sent a message to Col. Durnford, who had now moved with the main part of his force to Rorke's Drift, to proceed to Isandhlwana at once. Col. Pulleine was left in command of the camp.

Chelmsford's force reached Dartnell's position at daybreak. A mist was hanging over the hills and although Zulu fires had been seen during the night only a few outposts were now visible in the distance. A Zulu Force was later sighted on a ridge (probably the Pindu) in the general direction of the Ispezi mountain and a force consisting of mounted troops on the right, N.N.C. in the centre and the Artillery and 2/24th on the left moved towards this mountain. The N.N.C. found a few Zulus on the Slutshana hill while the mounted troops had a brush with some of the Pindu. At 9.30 am Chelmsford and his staff stopped for breakfast and received a message from Pulleine that there was a large force of Zulus to the left of the camp at Isandhlwana. Lieut. Milne was sent to the top of a hill to observe the camp through a telescope but reported all to be in order. Nevertheless one battalion of the N.N.C. was ordered to return to camp.

As Chelmsford found it impossible to come to grips with the Zulus he halted the advance and, having selected a site near Mangeni for the next main camp, ordered his troops to withdraw to it and sent a message to Pulleine to send on the baggage as a preliminary to moving the whole force to this site. After midday large bodies of Zulus were seen near Isandhlwana, while other factors leading to a supposition that all was not well at the main camp were that Zulu prisoners said that a large impi was on its way to Isandhlwana, some members of the party heard the gunfire and saw the gun flashes while the N.N.C. said they could see the Zulu impi at Isandhlwana. However, these reports must have been discounted or never reported to Chelmsford. Lieut. Milne's telescope used from a koppie near Mangeni, enabled him to report only that the tents were still standing, men were moving amongst them and that all was well.

MAP C

KEY TO DIORAMA

BATTLEFIELD OF ISANDHLWANA 22-JAN-79

B.

A.

N.N.C.

POSITION AT APPROX 12-15 P.M.

CAVAYE

MOSTYN

DYSON

UDUDUDU

DETATCHED OUTPOST BY NIGHT N.N.C.

UMKHUMTSHANE

INSANGPU

UVE

NGOBAMAKHOSI

UBONAMBI

UNODWENGU

UNDI CORPS UTHULWANA UDLOKO

UNOKENKE

YOUNGHUSBAND

MOSTYN

CAVAYE

N.N.C.

R.A.

PORTUES

ISANDHLWANA HILLS

2/3 N.N.C.

1/3 N.N.C.

N.N.C.

WARDELL

HQ

2/24

P

R.A

H

MTD. POL.

MTD. INF. CAR.

G

1/24

POPE

BLACKS KOPPIE

ROCKET BATTERY

DURNFORDS MTD. TROOPS

2800

2700

2600

2500

2400

2300

2200

2100

KEY

- 2000 — CONTOUR
- STREAM IN DONGA OR WITH STEEP BANKS.
- BRITISH TROOPS
- NATAL NATIVE CONT.
- ARTILARY (7 P.D.R)
- WAGONS
- H.Q. CHELMSFOR'S HEAD QTRS.
- H. HOSPITAL
- P. PIONEERS
- G. GUARD.
- S. SHEPSTONES ATTACK
- A. & B. MTD NATIVE TROOPS
- ZULU ADVANCE
- MTD TROOPS & ROCKET BATTERY
- ROUTE OF FUGITIVES

Browne, of the N.N.C., returning to camp, realised the desperateness of the position and sent messages to this effect back to those at Mangeni. One of these reached the guns under Col. Harness who commenced to race back to Isandhlwana, but Major Gossett (staff officer) would not allow this and obtained Chelmsford's ruling that Harness should proceed to Mangeni. At 2 p.m. Chelmsford commenced to ride back to Isandhlwana because he had received messages that fighting had broken out and that the baggage could not be sent. At 3.30 p.m. he received the report from Commandant Lonsdale that the Isandhlwana camp had been overrun. All troops were immediately ordered to proceed to Isandhlwana. Chelmsford waited about three miles from camp for the troops to concentrate. His patrols reported Zulus swarming all over the camp and as soon as the troops had concentrated he advanced with the guns in the centre, 3 companies of the 2/24th on each side and the N.N.C. on the flank.

THE ZULU DISPOSITIONS. (See Map B).

The Zulus had been following a well-thought-out plan of action. Realising that the central column was a major danger, a force of some 23,000 commanded by Ntshingwayo had advanced against this column leaving Ulundi on I7/I/I879; (note how the delay caused by building the road had allowed the Zulus time to manoeuvre). It slept near the Ispezi mountain on 20/I/I879 and on the night of 2I/I/I879 settled down, with a minimum of noise and without having lighted any fires, in the valleys near the farm Cudworth and in the valley of the Ngwebeni stream which flows into the Nondweni river. The Zulus did not intend to attack on 22/I/I879 but had planned to lie in wait all that day and launch a major offensive at dawn on 23/I/I879

THE EVENTS IN CAMP AND THE FATEFUL BATTLE(See Map C).

Once Chelmsford had left, the camp settled down to normal routine and it was not until 8 a.m. on 22/I/I879 that Col. Pulleine received reports of a body of Zulus to the north-east, when he sent a message to Chelmsford. The troops were called to arms and posted to cover this quarter of the camp, but as no attack developed they were marched back to their tents and stood at ease. Note that the peculiar formation of the plateau to the north of the camp makes the valleys where the Zulus were waiting invisible to the vedettes posted on its edge. At 9 a.m. some Zulus appeared on the edge of the plateau but very quickly disappeared and were reported to be withdrawing. Almost an hour later one of the N.N.C. pickets reported Zulus on the plateau.

At I0 a.m. Durnford, accompanied by 300 mounted Basutos and the rocket battery, arrived in camp and as senior officer took command It has been asserted that he quarrelled with Pulleine over the question of troop dispositions but no accurate information is available.

He ordered the.....

native levies to climb the mountain and received a report that the Zulus were retreating. (N.B. Even from the mountain top the Zulu was not visible). It would appear that at this stage Durnford and Pulleine had an early lunch.

Durnford now decided to follow the Zulus up, especially as some were said to be moving in the direction of Mangeni (Chelmsford's position). For this purpose he took the whole of his own force and requested Pulleine to give him a few companies of the 24th Regiment to strengthen it. This Pulleine refused, but promised to come to his aid if necessary. At II.30 am. two troops of Basutos, under Lieut. Raw, moved up to the plateau while Durnford, the remainder of the Basutos and the rocket battery moved east to the vicinity of the conical koppie. When the Basutos advanced across the plateau they came upon the main Zulu army. The course of events is somewhat vague but it would appear that the Basutos opened fire and retreated after having inflicted casualties. A Zulu regiment pursued them, leading to a general advance of the whole impi. The battle had begun. At this stage Durnford had advanced far across the plain to the east, but on hearing of the huge impi on his left he began to retreat and threw out Basutos in skirmishing order. While this operation was in progress the rocket battery got into difficulties amongst the boulders, and the crew was stabbed to death by a group of Zulus. By approximately I2.I5 Durnford had withdrawn to the big donga near the present store where he was supported by 30 to 40 Carbineers and mounted troops.

When Durnford left the camp Pulleine sent out one company of the I/24th to the spur of the plateau near the present church. The other troops were dismissed and it would appear that the camp was regarded as safe from attack. Shortly after, a message was brought from the plateau by Capt. Shepstone and as a result the troops were fallen in again. Another company of the 24th Regiment was sent to the ridge to be followed by a third. As the numbers of the Zulus became apparent the rest of the force available was rapidly deployed to the centre and the right. By about I2.00 pm the position was as shown in Map C. The troops held steady against the Zulu attack, keeping up a brisk fire while retreating towards the camp. At about I.00 pm. the left flank of the British line was resting on the north flank of the Isandhlwana mountain, the centre was located south of the present Mission Church and the right extent along the rocky ridge down towards the present store. Several times the Zulu advance wavered under the brisk fire of the troops but there were too few men to hold the long line, the supply of ammunition was not organised and the N.N.C. occupied a key position at the corner of the L-shaped line. (Map c)

As the firing slackened due to lack of ammunition the Zulus rushed forward in fierce charges. This broke the courage of the N.N.C. who fled from the key position at the corner of the L, through the camp and towards Natal, on the way divesting themselves of everything connected with military service hoping.....

to escape the vengeance of the Zulus should these ever be in a position to follow them over the Buffalo River. Their sudden flight enabled the Zulus to pour into the camp area cutting off the Individual companies of the 24th Regiment which formed into squares holding the Zulus at bay while their ammunition lasted. When this was exhausted the men defended themselves so ably with their bayonets that they were attacked mainly by throwing assegais. The groups of cairns on the plain clearly show the final position of the companies which were surrounded and killed almost to a man. Younghusband's company moved along the shoulder of the mountain and was finally cut down on the South-Eastern corner. Pulleine rallied a group and was killed near the centre of the area where the monuments are situated. Durnford retreated towards the centre of the camp but was overrun before he could reach it. A group of Carbineers held out for a while on the extreme right of the front. The entire camp was a scene of the utmost confusion: the Zulus mutilated the bodies, dressed themselves in uniforms and raided the stores, including the medicine store, the contents of which were consumed without regard to doctors' prescriptions.

The casualties have been assessed as follows:-

British forces:	Officers and men	858
	Native levies	471
Zulus (approximately)		3,000

THE FLIGHT TO FUGITIVES' DRIFT

As can be seen from Map C, the centre of the Zulu army advanced against the corner of the British L, while the "horns" of the impi encircled the left and right flanks. On the British right Durnford and the Carbineers made a determined but hopeless stand, but on the left flank the Zulus were able to encircle the mountain before meeting any resistance. Here on the south-east shoulder Capt. Shepstone led a sharp counter-attack in which he and the troops with him lost their lives, leaving the route open to the Zulus to encircle the camp from the west and cut off the escape route to Rorke's Drift.

The bulk of the N.N.C. had fled from the field at an early stage, i.e. about 12.45 or 1.00pm but by this time the Undi Corps was already menacing the road to Rorke's Drift so that a more direct route to the Buffalo River was followed. This led under the west slope of Black's Koppie, across the Amanzimnyama spruit, over the Impete ridge and across the Buffalo River at the present Fugitives' Drift. When the position on the battlefield became hopeless many others, including Coghill and Melvill followed this route which is clearly shown by the scattered graves (MapD) The first hazard to be encountered was a rocky torrent which hampered the horses and brought one of the artillery pieces to grief. After having negotiated this, the fugitives were confronted by a very deep donga, called in contemporary account.....

contemporary accounts a chasm, which was some I4 feet deep and apparently only fordable at a point near the Amanzimyama spruit. Even when this was crossed the fugitives still had to negotiate the boulder-strewn bed of the spruit. itself, climb the Impete ridge on the top of which a swamp was encountered and finally descend the rocky slope to the Buffalo River. As this was running in spate it formed the most difficult obstacle of all. It is unlikely that any one was able to leave the battlefield after I.30 p.m. as by then the Undi and Tulwana had cut the escape route from the west while the inGobamakhosi and the uMbonambi had crossed Black's Koppie from the east to join up with them.

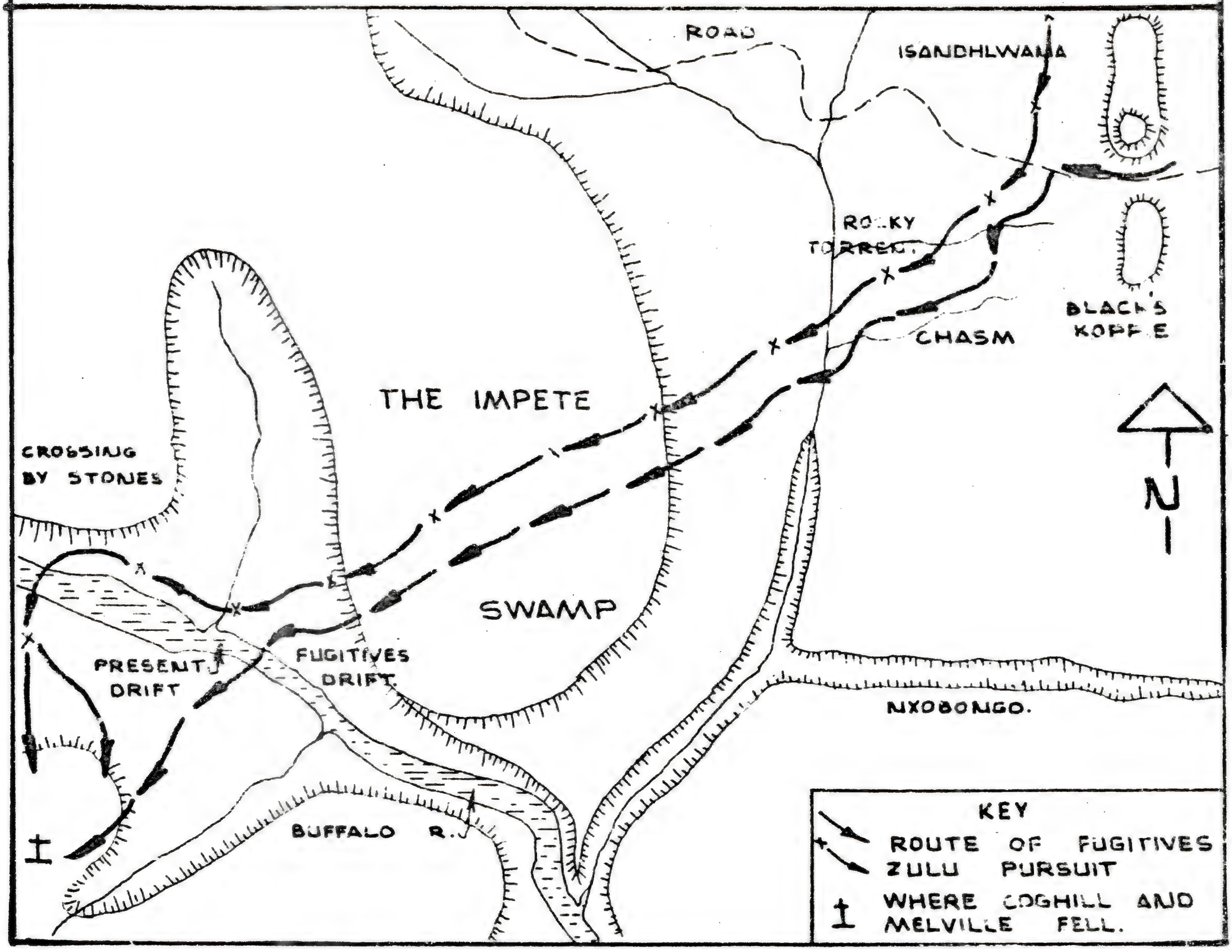
It is unknown how many Natal Native Corps survivors there were, but about 24 Europeans must have crossed at Fugitives' Drift. On the day of the battle the river was in spate, while the Zululand banks were more heavily grassed than they are at present.

Lieut. Melvill was instructed by Col Pulleine to rescue the Queen's colour of the Regiment and attempt to escape from Isandhlwana battlefield with it. This he did. While on his way to the Drift, he fell in with Lieut. Coghill who had hurt his knee during the attack on Sirayo's stronghold and was hardly able to walk but had managed to find a pony on the battlefield. On reaching the Buffalo River Coghill swam his horse safely through to the Natal bank. Melvill's horse slipped on a boulder and threw him into the river. While attempting to retain his grip on the colour he was washed into deep water. Coghill, seeing his plight, rode back into the river to assist him but his horse was killed by a bullet fired by the Zulus who had now reached the Zululand bank. After a desperate struggle the two officers, with Lieut. Higgenson who vainly attempted to assist with the colour, reached the Natal bank. Lieut. Higgenson was able to escape, but it is apparent that Melvill refused to leave Coghill and they were overtaken and killed just below the crest of the ridge. It is evident that Coghill being mounted, could easily have escaped had he left Melvill to his fate, and it would seem that Melvill once on the Natal side, could have reached safety had he left Coghill to struggle on alone. (See Map D).

The bodies were found on I/2/I879 and were buried under a common cairn by Rev. Smith on 3/2/I979 when a patrol, consisting of Maj. Black (3/24). Lieut. Harford (99), Lieut. Harber (N.N.C.) and others, was sent to look for the colours. Descending the krantz overlooking the river they erected a sangar to give protection from Zulu fire from the opposite bank and to afford covering for the party searching for the colour. An old fortification, probably the remains of this sangar, has been discovered near the river bank. Lieut. Harber recovered the colour case which was first spotted by Lieut. Harford in the bend of the river, which had fallen 6 ft. since the day of the battle. The pole with the colour still attached was found 50 yards further upstream on a rocky island and the crown 20 yards away.

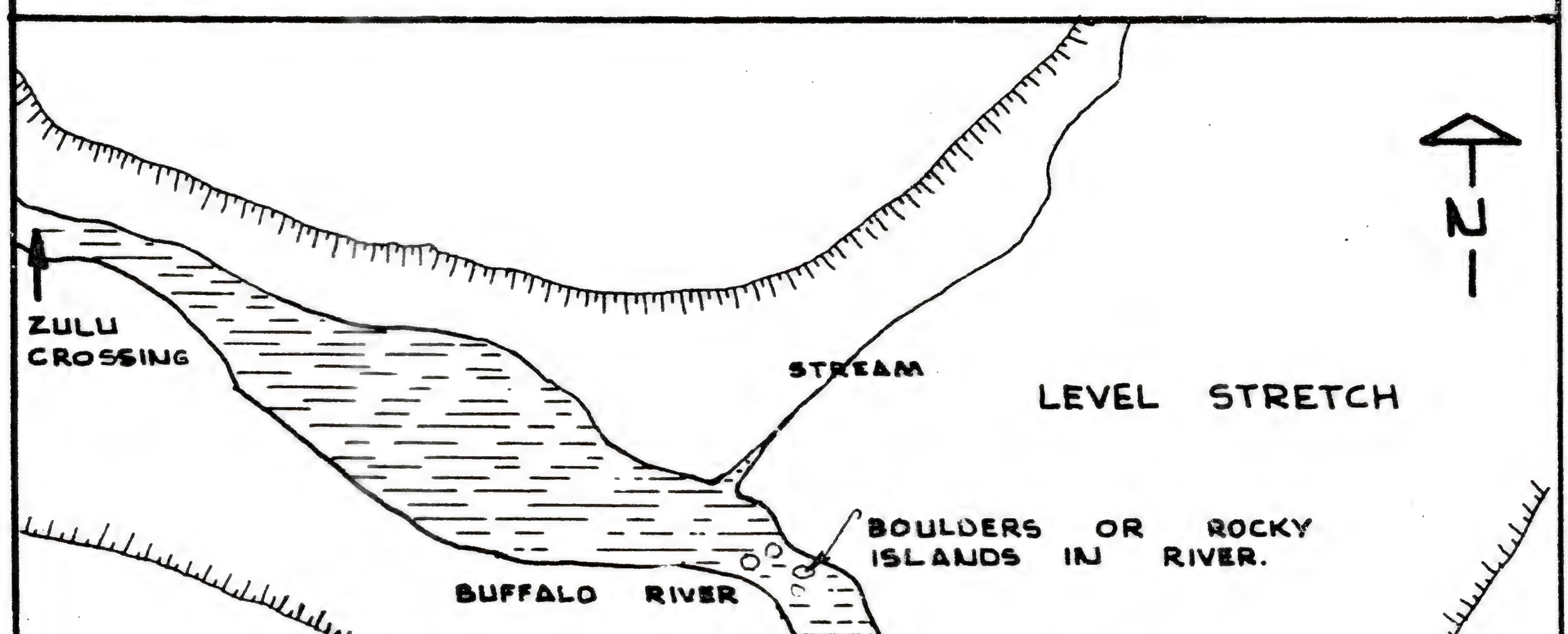
MAP D I

THE ROUTE TAKEN BY THE FUGITIVES



MAP D II

FUGITIVES DRIFT



On the 28th July, 1880, H.R.H. Queen Victoria attached a wreath of immortelles to the pole in commemoration of the stand at Rorke's Drift and the gallant conduct of Melvill and Coghill who were posthumously awarded the V.C. in 1907.

At a later date the bodies of the two officers were reinterred in two separate graves, according to some at a different spot.

The Zulus who overtook the fugitives probably crossed by jumping from stone to stone at a point higher up the river.

CHELMSFORD'S RETURN TO THE BATTLEFIELD.

We left Chelmsford some three miles from the battlefield waiting for his units to concentrate. As soon as possible he advanced to the position of the present store from where all that could be seen was the outline of the wagons against the night sky but nothing could be heard. Four rounds of shrapnel were fired into the col in an attempt to disturb any Zulus who might still be on the battlefield. As there was no response but echoes, three companies of the 2/24th Regiment led by Maj. Black advanced against the hill now generally known as Black's Koppie. While this was in progress, another four rounds were fired. As this also brought no response, a volley was fired but without result. Later a cheer from the troops announced that the koppie had been occupied, whereupon the whole force advanced to the crest of the col which was reached at about 9,00 p.m. There was no opportunity to pitch camp and the men had to sleep on the ground wherever a space could be found. Many encountered the mutilated bodies of their comrades when grouping for a place to lie down. To make matters worse, firing could be heard and the fire from the burning hospital at Rorke's Drift was clearly visible. At dawn the whole force moved off towards Rorke's Drift and although it passed within 400 yards of the Zulus withdrawing from the fight, no action was taken, as the Zulus had been too badly mauled, while Chelmsford's troops did not have enough ammunition to become involved in further hostilities.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD AND THE PRESERVATION OF CAIRNS.

The battlefield was not revisited until 17/5/1879, but most interments were made on 21-24/5/1879, by which time the bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition, the majority being unrecognisable. As the ground was too hard to enable graves to be dug quickly, the bodies were simply dragged into heaps and stones piled over them to form cairns. In subsequent years, monuments were built, but some of the cairns became neglected and fell into disrepair. Recent investigations have brought many of these to light, but further research is needed to establish the authenticity of some.

THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT.

The first indication of the disaster at Isandhlwana was brought to Lieuts. Chard and Bromhead at the drift at about 3,15 p.m. on 21/1/1879 by Lieut. Adendorff. Steps were immediately taken to fortify the position by connecting the store and hospital with walls of mealie bags, using a rocky ledge and stone kraal to strengthen the position. (See Map E). The outpost from the pontoons at the drift was recalled and so hard did the men work that by 4,15 p.m. the defences were almost complete. Shortly before this, a detachment of about 100 Basutos rode up. They were instructed to guard the drift and fall back on the Mission Station to assist in its defence if the Zulus should attack. At about 4,20 p.m. firing was heard from the south and at the threat of encirclement and on being told that their horses could not remain in the laager, the Basutos rode off towards Helpmekaar closely followed by a detachment of the N.N.C. Chard was left with approximately 110 able men to defend the post. At this critical juncture, he ordered his men to build a wall of biscuit boxes from the corner of the store to the rocky ledge (See Map E) thus forming a second line of defence.

The Zulu force which was approaching consisted mainly of the Undi Corps, some 3,000 strong, which had occupied the right flank at Isandhlwana and consequently taken almost no part in the fighting. They crossed the river about two miles downstream from Rorke's Drift and approached the position over the Eshiyane hill. The first attack developed about 4,30 p.m. from the flank of the hill towards the south wall of the defences. When this was beaten off, the Zulus circled round to their left to attack the north-west corner of the position under cover of thick bush. Here a fierce hand-to-hand combat took place. Firing from the shoulder of the hill caused heavy losses amongst the defenders of this side of the defences and when the hospital roof was fired, Chard decided to evacuate the western part of the position. While this was being done, the Zulus gained entry to the north-west room of the hospital and the verandah. As all front rooms opened on to the verandah, and there were no interleading doors, this forced some of the defenders to hold the doors with bayonets while others tunnelled through the walls to evacuate the sick through the south-west windows.

While the evacuation was taking place, a redoubt of mealie bags was built in the east part of the defences. Darkness might have spelt disaster but the burning hospital lit up the Zulus attacking from the west, making them easy targets. The defenders were, however, forced to withdraw from the biscuit box wall and lost the storeroom, so that they were completely surrounded in the redoubt and kraal but managed to hold the east wall of the kraal to the end. The Zulu attacks continued at short intervals until midnight, after which they slackened off, but the final withdrawal did not take place until about 4,00 p.m. by

which time their casualties must have numbered some 400 dead. At about 7.00 am. another force of Zulus appeared but soon withdrew on the arrival of the survivors of the Central Column from Isandhlwana. The defenders lost I5 Killed and I2 wounded. As a result of the action both officers and 9 other ranks were awarded V.C.'s.

Fort Melvill was built by the troops left in occupation of the drift after the battle. It is situated on a bluff overlooking the site of the pont and is still in a fair state of repair. An old wagon road leads up to it while the moat, wall and four gun emplacements are still clearly visible. A subsidiary fortification lying further west shows traces of the original loopholes but has been extensively damaged through the stones having been used to build a sheep kraal. These and other subsidiary fortifications were surrounded by a double trench with a parapet in the middle and having a circumference of some 3 to 4 miles. Traces of the various messes and rubbish dumps are still discernible. To the west of this main group of fortifications and lying on a slight rise is a series of trenches and low earth forti- e fications amongst which tins and bottles may be found. It is assumed this was the site of the camp while the fort was being constructed. The approach to the pont can also still be seen. (See Map F)

FORT NORTHAMPTON, MAY'S HOTEL SITE AND THE FIRST MAGISTRACY. (See Map F)

After the Fort was built by the British soldiers occupying this post of Zululand after the war. Hence the name Masodgeni given to the district. It is still in a fair state of repair. During the period of occupation a Mr. May and his partner ran a hotel for the troops. When it was placed out of bounds the venture collapsed. May is buried under the lee of the hill. The first European official in the area, A.L. Pretorius, also lived here and the house is still standing.

An early Norwegian Mission was founded near Masddgeni but the Missionary (M. Titlestad) was forced to withdraw shortly before the Zulu War.

Authorities which may be consulted:

I. Zulu Battlepiece. Coupland

2. Zulu War of I879. Intelligence Report H.M.S.O

3. Lord Chelmsford and the Zulu War. French.

4. In Zululand with the British. Norris-Newman.

5. Regimental History of the South Wales Borderers. Atkinson.

6. The Zulu War. Wilmot.

7. History of the Zulus. Gibson.

8. The Washing of the Spears. Morris.

MAP E — THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT 22·JAN·1879

APPROX SCALE

10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50

ROAD.

2ND ZULU ATTACK

W.C.

5' WALL

TREES

2' BANK

DITCH

HOSPITAL

1ST ZULU ATTACK

VERAN-DAH

OVEN

4' WALL OF MEALIE BAGS

ROCKY LEDGE

GARDEN AND TREES

2 WAGONS

OVEN

COOKHOUSE

BISCUIT BOXES

FENCE

COMMISSARIAT STORE

BUSH

WELL BUILT STONE KRAAL

REBOUT OF MEALIE BAGS

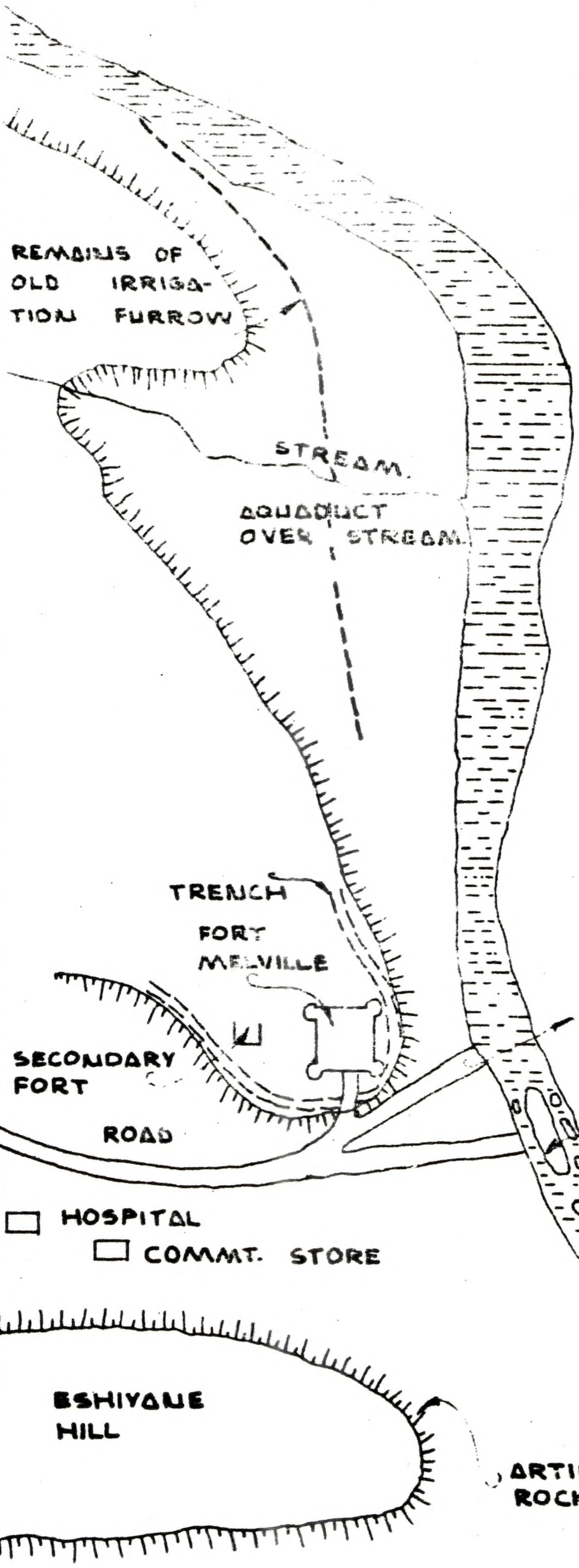
ROAD TO DRIFT →

ROUGH STONE KRAAL

N

MAP F

THE AREA IN THE VICINITY OF RORKE'S DRIFT



NB NOT TO SCALE
APPROX DIRECTIONS ONLY.